HOUSING ASOCIAL FAMILIES IN HOLLAND*

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Dutch Housing Progress

TO the student of housing, Holland presents several interesting features. The Dutch have grappled with their housing problems with such energy and resolve that, despite the unusually high fertility it still manifests,† the country at present possesses more available dwellings than families to be accommodated.

Although the first Dutch housing act was not introduced until the turn of the twentieth century (1901), its original terms were so comprehensive and detailed that, except for minor alterations and modifications, it has remained the basis of policy ever since. From the beginning State financial assistance for the erection of dwellings was exceptionally generous. Advances could be made to cover the *entire* cost of the proposed building, and a generous period of as much as fifty years was allowed for repayment. It was not until after the war, however, that full advantage was taken of this law. In 1920, after the almost complete cessation of building activity during the years of hostilities, the shortage of dwellings was estimated as between 60,000 and 100,000 out of an existing total of 1,380,000.‡ By the time of the 1930 census, the deficit had become a surplus of 50,000 dwellings over and above the number of households in the country.*

Housing Problem Families

This achievement places Holland decidedly in the forefront of European housing progress. The Dutch however have also been pioneers in another direction—namely that of providing accommodation for families whose habits of living make them undesirable and unsatisfactory tenants. Sociologically, these tenants form a heterogeneous collection—they may be dirty, they may be dipsomaniacs, they may be aggressive and quarrelsome, or they may merely possess unpunctual habits in the payment of rent. Their common quality is that they are difficult to live with. It may appear somewhat contradictory that the principle of segregating people of this character should first have been widely accepted in a country with as strong an individualist tradition as Holland. But from another point of view it may be regarded merely as carrying to the extreme the normal practice of social segregation in a community sharply stratified by social classes—an equally prominent characteristic of Dutch society. For example, most housing estates and residential areas serve quite limited sections of the population, and strenuous objections are usually raised against any proposal to build municipal estates near wealthy districts.

The alleged intention of these schemes of segregation is reformative. Their purpose is stated as being " to level those families up by teaching them how to live in a better

* This article consists of one section of a report on European Housing that the author is preparing for the Population Investigation Committee. It is hoped that the complete report will be available shortly.

† The birth rate of Holland is still sufficiently high to ensure that the population is reproducing itself. In 1935 the net reproduction rate was 1·102, i.e. every 1,000 women were producing 1,102 future mothers, compared with 764 in England and 866 in France.

‡ See *Housing Policy in Europe*, p. 103. I.L.O. 1930. The estimate of 60,000 is also given by H. van der Kaa, General Inspector of Health in The Hague, in his book *Housing Policy in the Netherlands*, p. 32. Geneva, 1935.

* H. van der Kaa, *op. cit.* This surplus does not necessarily indicate an equable distribution of supply between the various social classes. In 1930 there were still 9·6 per cent. of all dwellings overcrowded (i.e. more than two to a room), which implies that there must still be a shortage of lower-rented dwellings of sufficiently large size.

way . . . . and to make them well-behaved families and desirable tenants,"* or even just simply " to teach them to live in a better home."† Occasionally, however, a more material note is to be detected, and it is suggested that by this means it is possible for the municipality to avoid the rapid deterioration of municipal property by people who have been accustomed to slum living.‡

Although colonies for housing "asocial" families have been in existence in Holland only for fifteen years or so, the problem was already being discussed in the immediate pre-war years, as part of the general question of re-housing slum tenants. The first colonies to be formed were accommodated in temporary quarters. For example, as early as 1917, Amsterdam families who were considered " asocial " in character were housed in a disused school, under the supervision of two pensioned policemen. In the following years, one or two additional groups were set up, but again in temporary premises. The first permanent colony was not erected until 1923, when 106 houses, called the "Controle Woningen" were built by The Hague municipality. The example of The Hague was soon followed by Amsterdam. In 1924, official support was granted to the first of the Amsterdam colonies, Zeeburgerdorp, which was built in 1926. The estate comprised fifty-five concrete houses, each with living-room, kitchen, W.C., and one to four bedrooms. In addition, generous communal facilities were provided, including a bath-house, laundry, club-rooms, free health services for all on the estate, and even a day nursery for children between the ages of one-and-a-half and five years. All these amenities were free, with the exception of the use of the laundry apparatus, for which a small additional charge was made. It is interesting to notice the inclusion of day-nurseries in the scheme, since in Holland crèches are not usually to be found in planned housing estates. One reason for this is the generally accepted view that the family provides the most desirable environment for the child. Another, arising no doubt out of the first, is that the special housing law of Holland (Woningwets) arranges for financial assistance for housing in the narrow sense only, and is rarely extended to cover general communal and social services. The provision of crèches in these special communities is justified, however, on the grounds that the child of socially abnormal parents will find a better environment in a well-equipped nursery than he could possibly obtain in his own home, and more care and attention can thus be bestowed upon him during the formative pre-school years.

To the poor and overworked mothers of the families inhabiting the colonies these crèches were particularly helpful. Holland is one of the few European countries where large families are still frequently to be found. According to the 1930 census figures, over half of all families had two or more children, and over one-third had three or more children.* Since there is at present a considerable differential fertility between social classes,† most of the large families occur in the poorer sections of the community, from which tenants for the " asocial " housing groups are drawn. Thus, the number of children per family in the Amsterdam groups is given as five, and those in The Hague Controle Woningen as 4·6.‡

Flats or Cottages?

Unlike their Italian counterparts, each dwelling in the Dutch schemes for accommodating undesirable families consists of a separate house, which is built as solidly and as well as ordinary municipal houses. Throughout Holland the small family house has remained both the ideal and the prevailing type, contrary to what might have been expected in so small a country, where flat building

* See recent report, issued by the Housing Department of Amsterdam (mimeographed, undated).

† Hague Housing and Town Planning Dept. Private communication.

‡ See Amsterdam report, *op. cit.*

* These figures apparently refer to children of all ages, since no age limits are given in the official publications.

† For a fuller treatment of differential fertility, see J. H. van Zanten and T. van den Brink, "Population phenomena in Amsterdam." *Population*, vol. II, Nos. 3 and 4. (1937-8.)

‡ Privately supplied figures. The average size of the families in The Hague group shows considerable fluctuations from year to year, the highest figure being 5·5 for 1927 and the lowest 2·8 for 1935.

would at least have the advantage of conserving space. Two factors however have militated against the building of blocks of flats—in the first place, the difficulty of providing adequate foundations for large-sized buildings in a soil that is frequently waterlogged, and secondly, the persistence of the family tradition. In Holland, almost as much as in England, the house is considered the family "castle," and the care and attention bestowed upon all housing problems reflect this fact. Although some large towns, particularly Amsterdam and Rotterdam, have a considerable proportion of their dwellings in the form of flats, it is still true to say that throughout the country the single-family house predominates. Unfortunately, the last available general housing census was taken in 1919, and it is not easy to tell whether there has been any considerable alteration in the position since then. In 1919, flats comprised over ninety per cent. of all the dwellings in both Amsterdam and Rotterdam, and just under seventy per cent. in The Hague. But if we exclude the six largest towns,* ninety-three per cent. of all dwellings were in the form of single-family houses while the figure for the whole country, including the towns, was as much as seventy-two per cent.† At present, emphasis continues to be laid on the necessity for more one-family houses, in discussions of housing problems. Even in Amsterdam, the new town plan includes a large number of dwellings of this type. Since the object of the special schemes for undesirable families is to inculcate standards of "normal" living, it is natural for them to have been planned as individual homes rather than as blocks of flats.‡

The "Controle Woningen" in The Hague

About a year after the Zeeburgerdorp estate was built, the municipality considered it so successful that the larger and better-known colony of Asterdorp was planned and erected. This consisted of 132 houses, with individual and communal accommodation similar to that at Zeeburgerdorp. Neither of these Amsterdam estates however possess the rigid classification incorporated in The Hague "Controle Woningen." Here the 106 dwellings are subdivided into three social classes as follows:*

1st class dwellings — 38
2nd class dwellings — 14
3rd class dwellings — 54

Third class tenants were, of course, those considered most "asocial" in behaviour, while first-class tenants were the least abnormal, and the degree of control exercised over each varied accordingly. For this purpose, the colony was built in fan-shaped formation, with the supervisor's house in the middle. The third-class group were housed in the centre, and had to pass through the supervisor's lodge to reach their own dwellings. They were thus subject to constant supervision. Second-class tenants were placed towards the outside of the group, and while they too had to pass the supervisor's lodge, they were not under continual surveillance. First-class tenants lived on the outside, and their dwellings were more normally set out along two streets. They could enter their homes independently, and enjoyed a considerable amount of freedom. The houses varied in their provision of comfort too; those on the inside (third-class), for example, were without gardens at all; those on the outside possessed individual plots of the popular type. For all tenants on the estate a curfew was imposed, and baths were compulsory (and free) once a fortnight. The families were subject to re-classification at intervals, and the lower categories might work their way through the various grades to qualify eventually for a normal municipal dwelling. In the Amsterdam colonies, too, tenants whose social

* Namely, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Hague, Utrecht, Haarlem, and Groningen.

† Census data, quoted by H. van der Kaa (*op. cit.*).

‡ Although in the provision of light and air there is little difference between Dutch flats and houses, private gardens are considered an invaluable adjunct to healthy and happy family life. Van der Kaa thinks that gardens provide the necessary fresh air and exercise for children, and in addition form a centre of interest for adults, and a helpful factor in the fight against alcoholism, immorality, etc. It is not yet usual to find such amenities as bathrooms or central heating in the lower-rented dwellings, since it is apparently considered more important to devote the additional cost of these luxuries to the provision of roomier and separate dwellings. (*op. cit.*, pp. 22-7.)

* These figures are for 1923, when the scheme started.

behaviour showed sufficient improvement would eventually be rewarded by transfer to an ordinary estate.

Selection and Accommodation of Families

Although there is no legal compulsion for families to enter these colonies, the determining factor is the absence of any other dwelling at a suitable rent that the tenant could afford. Thus, in practice, most people who inhabit the special dwellings have little choice in the matter, and once they accept tenancy they are naturally obliged to conform to the regulations attached. All applicants for municipal houses have to submit to an examination of their home circumstances, and it is by this means that the undesirable group are selected. Such families are then not allowed to inhabit the ordinary estates until they have been subjected to the reformative influence of the asocial colonies, and have shown that they are capable of improvement. In Amsterdam, each colony is in charge of a woman inspector who keeps close social contact with families in her care, and gives advice when necessary on all matters connected with housekeeping problems, children's education, etc. She is also responsible for the collection of rent, and reports to the authorities periodically on home conditions.

The houses provided are built on one floor only. They contain a varying number of bedrooms, suitable for families of different sizes, since under the terms of the Dutch housing law, each dwelling must contain a sufficient number of rooms to enable children of different sexes to sleep in separate bedrooms.* Thus, in addition to living quarters which may consist of one kitchen-living-room or a separate kitchen and living-room, up to four bedrooms are provided, in houses which are either fully detached or semi-detached. The following figures of the sizes of houses in Zeeburgerdorp and Asterdorp convey an idea of the generous accommodation provided, particularly when compared with the one-room dwellings built for families of this type in Italy.

	*No. of bedrooms per house**			
	1.	2.	3.	4.
Zeeburgerdorp	3	16	25	12
Asterdorp ...	—	43	35	48

Most housing experts who have visited the estates agree that they are well-built and attractively laid out.†

Rents and Subsidies

Financially the schemes are not successful. They are run at a loss, and both rent and social services are subsidized by the authorities.‡ But it is claimed that the cost to the community would be greater if such families were not subject to general supervision and reformative influence, since they include many fathers who would probably otherwise be in prison, and wives and children who would be in public institutions or infirmaries. The rents charged appear to be lower than those generally prevailing for working-class dwellings in the same towns. A recent list of average municipal rents in Amsterdam ranges from 3·0 florins to 6·50 florins per week.§ In this list, the rents of the asocial colonies are given as a minimum of 2·75 florins and a maximum of 3·50 florins, the average being about 3·25 florins per week. The mean annual rent for workers' dwellings is given by the Amsterdam municipal yearbook as 325 florins per annum (Jan. 1938), which suggests that the higher figure of 6·50 florins in the municipal list is the more usual one. This means that the rents of dwellings in the special colonies are only slightly more than half the usual figure. In the Controle Woningen, there are wider variations, due to the three-fold classification employed. But even here the figure for

* The original limit was fourteen years, but this was considered too high, and has since been lowered to twelve years.

* Figures from the Congress Report on Housing for Special Groups, p. 9 (Holland). Published by International Federation for Housing and Town Planning, Stockholm, 1909.

† See for example Elizabeth Denby, *Europe re-housed*, 1938.

‡ In Amsterdam, for example, the subsidy allowed on each dwelling is sixty guilders a year, which is ten more than the present maximum for ordinary municipal dwellings.

§ Privately supplied by the Nederlandsch Instituut voor Volkshuisvesting en Stedebouw.

the first-class dwellings is lower than the average. The scale is as follows :*

Third-class dwellings—3·30 florins per week
Second-class „ —3·80 „ „ „
First-class „ —5·00 „ „ „

Consequently, the worker who lives in an asocial colony and who is in regular employment, pays a lower proportion of his income in rent than is common in Holland, where rents for the lower-income groups appear to be unusually high. The most recent investigation gives the average figure for the lowest-income group in Amsterdam (1934-5) as 25·8 per cent. of income.† Families in the special colonies however would have to spend only about half this proportion if in regular employment, and even if the family income were not regular (which is more likely among the families classed as "problem" cases than among ordinary workers), the rent would rarely form a higher percentage of income than is usual in large towns in Holland.

Results of Schemes

The effects of these measures on different families appear to vary considerably. In Amsterdam, 43 Zeeburgerdorp families and 101 Asterdorp families have been drafted to ordinary dwellings. Figures are not available of the number who have passed through the estates, but when we consider that the former colony consists of 55 houses, and has existed for thirteen years, and the latter of 132 dwellings built twelve years ago, we may conclude that either a very small proportion of families qualify for ordinary dwellings, or that the rate of re-classification is slow. In all the colonies it has been found that a number of families remain for years, apparently resisting with success all the beneficent influence of the special housing facilities. Some of these individuals are no doubt cases for the psycho-pathologist; while others are just mentally backward. It has been agreed that even for those families who appear incapable of improvement, schemes of supervision are worth while, since it is possible to ensure for them healthy dwellings and decent environment, which, in addition to benefiting the people concerned, are considered to possess a wider social significance.

Recently it has become increasingly difficult to find sufficient people to fill the colonies. J. L. Flipse, Director of Housing in Amsterdam, gives the present figures of occupation as 69 dwellings in Asterdorp out of a total of 132 and 24 out of 55 in Zeeburgerdorp.* That is, only about fifty per cent. of the houses are occupied at present, compared with eighty per cent. in 1933. Similarly, in the Controle Woningen, 53 out of a possible 106 were in occupation in December 1936, while a year later the number had dropped to 18, compared with 102 in 1924 and 101 in 1925.† How can this decline be explained? Is it due to a general improvement in the standard of behaviour and housing, or to the fact that families who would previously have been forced to inhabit the controlled colonies are now able to find other accommodation?

Both of these explanations probably contain a measure of truth. The present housing surplus has undoubtedly meant that many tenants who would otherwise have been forced to apply for municipal houses have found satisfactory accommodation elsewhere, even though at higher rents. They thereby avoid the somewhat humiliating investigation into their sociable qualities. At the same time, with the rapid disappearance of slums, the kind of social behaviour that is associated and frequently engendered by them also disappears. In Holland, large sums of money

* From article entitled "New quarters and the development of flats in Amsterdam," filed in the library of the Housing Centre; undated but recent.

† Enquiry conducted by the Bureau van Statistiek, Amsterdam, into the budgets of 184 families. The figures were kindly sent to the author by the Director of the Bureau, Dr. R. Claeys, and are as follows:

Income category	*Proportion spent in rent*
Under 1,400 fl. per annum	25·8 per cent.
1,400-1,900 fl. „	20·3 „
1,900-2,900 „ ...	16·5 „
2,900-4,000 „ ...	13·4 „
4,000-6,000 „ ...	12·9 „
6,000-12,000 „ ...	10·9 „
12,000 fl. and over	10·1 „

* In a letter to the author dated May 1939.

† Figures supplied privately by the Director of The Hague Housing and Town Planning Department.

have been devoted in recent years to the abolition of slums,* and clearance is being carried out in most districts in conformity with the building development plans that all communes with more than 10,000 inhabitants are required to prepare. Thus, since the "asocial" category of the population appears to a large extent to have been a product of unsatisfactory housing conditions, the improvement in these is itself leading to a diminution in the size of this special group. Those who remain "social problems" can hardly be regarded as a group at all. They are rather a heterogeneous collection of families, each with its individual peculiarity of behaviour. It does not seem that the method of dealing with this remainder by means of special housing facilities and specially trained housing inspectors is a particularly satisfactory one, since adequate treatment involves knowledge of a variety of specialist problems not usually within the province of a single individual. It has been found in practice increasingly difficult to obtain women who will take on the task of readapting this mixed collection to a new social environment. These who do try find the work so exhausting and difficult that the Amsterdam authorities have been led to recommend a restriction of their period of service to five years. Probably the results would have been more satisfactory if some of the families still housed in the controlled estates had been placed in the hands of skilled psychiatrists, for a scientific investigation into the causes of their maladjustment to be made.

Admittedly, territorial concentration of "abnormal" families does facilitate detailed control and direction of the lives and education of children. But the number of children involved necessarily diminishes with a decrease in the number of families housed, and the task of supervising them individually if they were to live in scattered communities is thus more practicable than formerly. It is questionable too whether specialized education can make up for the double environmental disability from which these children suffer. In addition to a somewhat abnormal home environment, the stigma of being in a specialized colony must exercise an undesirable influence on the development of youthful minds. As far as Holland is concerned, however, the whole question will soon become one of academic importance alone. Present indications suggest that within a comparatively short time the asocial estates will have virtually disappeared. The Director of Housing in Amsterdam has already announced his intention of proposing that Asterdorp be closed, and only the smaller estate retained.* In The Hague, the authorities have almost closed down the Controle Woningen as a special scheme, and at present only a dozen or so of the houses are being used for the purpose for which they were originally intended. The rest are classed as ordinary municipal dwellings.

However interesting the Dutch schemes may have been, therefore, the fact that they are proving short-lived suggests that they are no more than a temporary expedient, suitable to a certain stage in the progress of re-housing, but now rendered superfluous by the great advances made during the past decade.

Summary

Great progress has been made in Holland in the provision of adequate housing facilities since the beginning of the century, particularly during the post-war period. In

* For the purpose of building new dwellings to replace slums, contributions are made by the State to cover the deficit in management, in addition to ordinary advances for building the dwellings. The deficit may not be more than fifty florins per annum, half of which is borne by the State, and the other half by the local authority. The condition of this award is that the number of dwellings erected must equal those evacuated. From 1925-37, the State contributed 313,277 florins for 11,437 dwellings, under the terms of this special regulation. In addition a subsidy is given for slum tenants in rural areas who are owners of their own dwellings, to make it possible for them to build new ones. For this purpose, the Treasury makes a lump sum grant up to a maximum of 300 florins, and requires the commune to contribute the same amount. Between 1928 and 1937, 65,535 florins have been granted in respect of 231 dwellings of this type. Altogether, therefore, the Treasury has been involved in an expenditure of 378,812 florins since 1925 for slum-clearance subsidies. Local authorities have contributed a similar amount. (Figs. from H. van der Kaa, *op. cit.*, and privately.)

* Communicated by J. L. Flipse to the author.

addition, experiments in accommodating "special groups" have been carried out. Arrangements for one such group, the "asocial" families, are discussed in the preceding article. In essence the scheme consists of segregating the families, providing them with adequate accommodation, and subjecting them to varying degrees of supervision. Several schemes are described in detail and the results assessed. While their educative influence is admitted, the general rise in Dutch housing standards has led to a steady dwindling of the size of the group, and the families which remain cannot be regarded as constituting a distinct housing problem as such.